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GAPS AND OVERLAPS IN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH.

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INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN THE JUNIOR COLLEGES IS A RECENT DEVELOPMENT AND UNTIL THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGE INFORMATION, NO EFFECTIVE MEANS OF DISSEMINATING THE RESULTS OF THIS RESEARCH HAS BEEN AVAILABLE. CERTAIN GAPS EXIST IN TYPES OF RESEARCH, PROBLEMS STUDIED, AND FOCUS--(1) STUDIES OF STUDENTS COMMONLY EMPHASIZE PERFORMANCE AFTER TRANSFER, BUT DO NOT ASSESS CAUSES OF GOOD OR POOR PERFORMANCE, NOR DO THEY DRAW INFERENCES OR CONCLUSIONS. NEED EXISTS FOR STUDIES OF DROPOUTS AND TERMINAL STUDENTS. (2) CURRICULUM STUDIES TYPICALLY COVER DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS, SURVEYS OF OTHER INSTITUTIONS, SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR LOW ABILITY STUDENTS, AND FEASIBILITY STUDIES FOR NEW PROGRAMS. LITTLE EVALUATIVE RESEARCH HAS BEEN PERFORMED. (3) EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS ARE REPORTED IN DESCRIPTIONS AND STATEMENTS OF RATIONALE, WITH SOME ATTEMPT AT EVALUATION. (4) THERE IS EVIDENCE OF NEED FOR RESEARCH IN CLASSROOM TESTING. FEWER THAN 20 PERCENT OF THE UNITED STATES JUNIOR COLLEGES HAVE ORGANIZED INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS. INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH, NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE PLANNING AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AND COLLEGES, MUST BE EMPHASIZED AND SUPPORTED. THIS DOCUMENT APPEARED IN "JUNIOR COLLEGE JOURNAL," VOLUME 38, NUMBER 3, NOVEMBER 1967. (WO)

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GAPS AND OVERLAPS IN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

The Clearinghouse for Junior College Information at U.C.L.A. Hopes To Encourage Research Through Its Bibliographic Services

By John E. Roueche

Literature in the field of the community college is growing at a rate comparable with that of institutional growth. Many books on the junior college have been written in the past forty years. Several educational journals are focused on this area of education. Research on problems relevant to junior colleges is conducted by universities, state departments of education, various educational associations, private corporations, and by the institutions themselves.

Institutional research *in* the community college, however, is a recent phenomenon. The community college itself may be characterized as a product of the twentieth century. Except for a few isolated cases, organized research in the community college was unknown prior to the second half of this century.[1]

Recognizing this paucity of research, junior college leaders are becoming increasingly aware of the value of research in all institutions and they have begun to understand the need to compile and disseminate research findings. But a major problem results: compilations of findings are relatively unknown. To fill the gap, the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior College Information has focused its emphasis on obtaining and making available these so-called "fugitive" institutional research studies. ("Fugitive" indicates that the study has not been published and/or widely disseminated.) Currently these institutional research studies are the most fruitful, untapped source of information on the community college.

At this point, a definition of terms is appropriate. For our purposes, institutional research will be regarded as a designation for self-studies conducted by junior colleges.[2] These studies may be concerned with issues which have current application or they may be basic to long-term institutional planning.[3]

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Any local investigation directed toward providing data in administration, planning, evaluation, or policy formulation is considered institutional research.[4] The most important factor is that it be an analysis conducted by a junior college of one or more aspects of its current or future academic or fiscal operations.[5] In brief, all studies done within the college, involving any phase of the institution, its program or operations, are included in the term, institutional research.[6]

Gaps and Overlaps

Since it began operation in the summer of 1966, the Clearinghouse for Junior College Information has processed approximately one thousand documents, the majority of which are institutional research studies produced by junior college research offices or designated staff members.

Although some valuable research is being done, certain gaps in types of research, problems studied, and focus have appeared. Following are four major categories in which many studies have been conducted resulting in some gaps and overlaps:

Junior college students: The typical junior college research study on this topic is a follow-up report on the junior college transfer student. For the most part, these follow-up studies focus on success of the junior college transfer student, with success being measured by grades earned at four-year colleges and universities. These studies inevitably seem to lead to the conclusion that:

1. Students who enter junior colleges and eventually transfer to senior institutions typically experience a lower grade-point average during the first semester following transfer.
2. In most cases, the transfer student's grades recover from the loss which occurs during the first semester.
3. Grade-point averages of transfers improve with each successive semester in which they are enrolled at the senior institution.
4. The transfer student who does graduate may take longer to reach the baccalaureate than does a comparable native student.

These research findings tend to corroborate conclusions of Knoell and Medsker,[7] and reinforce research data going as far back as 1928.[8]

Although a few of these institutional research studies add bibliographical data on students, most include only grade compilations and comparisons tabulated by subject area and name of transfer institution. They are limited in scope since they do not provide an insight into reasons for the transfer student's success or failure; nor do they attempt to draw inferences, conclusions, or recommendations for modifying junior college offerings in light of their findings. At present there is a crucial need to expand the scope of research to include attacks on problems associated with junior college transfer students.

One aspect of the dilemma is inherent in the way in which junior colleges view themselves and their functions. Junior colleges claim to be multipurpose, comprehensive institutions, yet the typical research study focuses on only one segment of the institution's students—those who transfer to four-year institutions.

Evaluating the accomplishments of students who leave the junior college prior to earning a degree or prior to completing a program of instruction is one of the most pressing problems we face. In a recent investigation of problems in California junior colleges, the "dropout" problem was identified as the third most important area of twenty-six such problems needing further study and research. The need was summarized as follows:

1. What do students gain from attending junior colleges for one semester or one year?
2. Do students gain anything from enrolling in junior college and withdrawing prior to completing one semester?
3. What happens to students who are dismissed because of poor scholarship?
4. Is student dropout a serious problem?
5. Why do students withdraw from college?
6. How may the dropout rate be reduced?
7. What values do students possess that cause them to make early or late, wise or unwise, effective or ineffective career decisions?[9]

There is need for junior colleges to initiate research on dropouts to answer the questions posed above. The overwhelming majority of junior college students have not been the subjects of junior college institutional research.

Curriculum development and evaluation: Institutional research studies of junior college curriculums have focused attention on the following topics: (a) institutional and departmental curricular programs developed within the framework of specific educational objectives; (b) status studies of curricular programs at other institutions; (c) specific programs for low-ability students; and (d) feasibility studies to determine the need for new, occupationally oriented curricular programs.

A few experimental community colleges have produced studies which developed a rationale for defining educational objectives as a first step in curriculum development. These studies are valuable because they represent an institutional effort to state learning objectives in terms of desired behavioral outcomes. The behaviorally specified learning objectives represent those competencies expected of

any student who receives credit for a given course. Such a process provides the classroom teacher with a sound basis for designing and evaluating a program of study.

While most attention has been given to the development of programs for low-ability students, there has been little research in the evaluation of these programs. The problem is compounded by the fact that the typical junior college recognizes the need for remedial or developmental studies, yet few of them have engaged in systematic evaluation of these programs.

All evidence indicates that junior college leaders are aware of the need for systematic curriculum evaluation. The Peterson report lists as the number one problem facing California junior colleges:

"... measuring the effectiveness of instruction, including evaluation of (1) teaching methods, (2) new methodology, (3) textbooks, (4) library materials, (5) relation of class to educational gain, (6) special facilities, (7) in-service education, and (8) testing devices and the development of guidelines for good teaching."[10]

This presents another problem: though junior college leaders express interest in curriculum evaluation, the limited research they perform bears little evidence of an evaluation orientation. In brief, there is little indication that current research in the area of junior college curriculum results in program modification based on specific research findings and recommendations.

Experimental programs: Research studies of experimental programs vary widely in purpose, content, and findings. Investigations of experimental programs in the junior college usually fall into one of the following categories: status studies of experimental programs at other institutions; summary statements of rationale provided and procedures followed in the establishment of an experimental program; evaluation studies of comparative instructional approaches; and controlled experimental research projects.

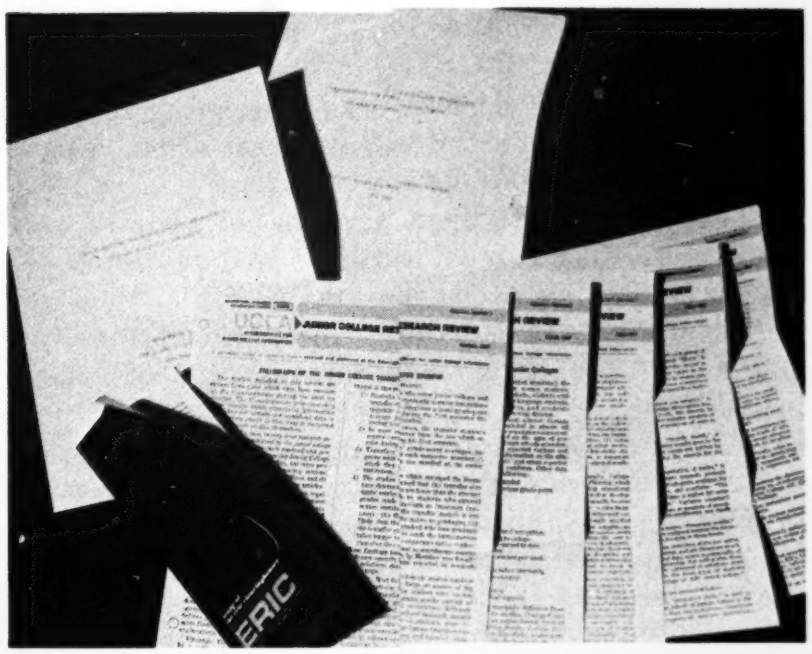
Three studies with broad implications for the field are, briefly:

1. Golden West College, Huntington Beach, California, developed an audio-tutorial approach in its liberal arts biology courses by following these methodological procedures: (a) defining each goal in measurable terms; (b) establishing a hierarchy of goals for greatest emphasis in the course; (c) determining the time to be given each unit, or goal; (d) recording tapes, writing and preparing workbooks and laboratory manuals; and (e) securing from the dean for institutional research an identification of the kinds of data which must be assembled to assure adequate evaluation of the program from its inception.[11] Because it represents an effort to build a program on the basis of specific learning objects, the Golden West report is of particular value. Perhaps more important, the study provides a suggestion for continuous evaluation.

2. The findings of an experimental project for low-ability students at Los Angeles City College resulted in a specific program alteration. Evidence gained from the experimental program demonstrated that while progress was made in raising the reading level of the students involved in the program, not enough progress could be made in a semester or a year to enable the student to move into regular classes with a reasonable chance of success. Since most low-ability students did not continue in the college for more than one academic year, it was decided to emphasize those things which would help the student to know himself and his potential, to help him accept realistic vocational goals, and to help him become a better citizen. Based on specific research findings, the focus of the program for low-ability students was shifted from remediation to general education.[12]

3. A research study to determine if large classes are conducive to effective learning in the writing skills was recently completed at Indian River Junior College, Fort Pierce, Florida. While there was some variation in student preferences, the results of the pre-test and post-test showed that, given the same quality of instructors, program, and students involved in the experiment, class size to fifty-six students is far from a significant variable in the learning of writing skills.[13]

These three serve as examples of well-designed studies in the area of experimental programs. In



general, however, few studies have been completed that relate to experimentation in the area of instructional improvement. In 1963, Johnson found that "few junior colleges have initiated plans of approval and may be designated as 'islands of innovation' in education."[14] The need for more research and experimentation in this area is patently clear.

Classroom testing: For the junior college student, the part of the course which is of vital concern is also the part about which very little research has been done—the uses, administration, and evaluation of the classroom test.[15] Considering its importance, there is need for more information on the proper function of the classroom test in the junior college. There are varied accounts of the use of standardized tests for screening and placement, but there is not yet sufficient research on the testing of course content as a measure of learning.

Perhaps one reason for the relatively small number of research studies on classroom testing is that both test and course material are faculty prerogatives and junior college faculty members do not typically report on their class procedures. Despite this, it cannot be denied that teachers should attempt to answer the basic questions:

1. For what purpose are tests given?
2. Are test questions primarily geared to recall of course content?
3. Do tests really assess achievement of course goals?
4. How might experts in test construction aid teachers in designing effective tests?[16]

Undoubtedly most teachers would agree that they want to retain the right to conduct their own testing. Many of them, though, would be interested in learning about the experience of other teachers in similar situations. These teachers would welcome sound innovations, separated from rumor and hunch —innovations suggested by their counterparts in other junior colleges and adaptable to similar courses elsewhere.

Some Perspectives

A recent investigation of institutional research in the junior colleges of the United States found that fewer than 20 per cent of the junior colleges have formally organized programs of institutional research and fewer than one-third of the colleges surveyed had plans for evaluating their research programs.[17] Effective institutional research programs are the result of a commitment to the need for research as a prerequisite to institutional planning. Institutional research in the junior college needs increased financial support and renewed emphasis on the endeavor. If programs are to be planned and systematically evaluated, if effects of the college on its community and on the lives of its students are to be assessed, junior college institutional research must be supported to a degree greater than its current level.

Through its efforts the Clearinghouse for Junior College Information is attempting to control the research literature in a bibliographic sense. It is also endeavoring to support junior college research by adding emphasis to the institutional reseach presently produced in community colleges.

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